FIGHT A WAGE-CUT CONTRACT

NYC Transit Workers Collide with Rulers' War Budget

The anger among NYC's 33,000 rank-and-file transit workers led to the rejection of the sellout wage-cut agreement negotiated between union president Roger Toussaint and the MTA bosses, following the militant 3-day strike which shut down the world's largest transit system.

"We did not strike to give more and get less, but that's what happened," transit worker Richard Watson told the NY Times (1/10) after a meeting at which Toussaint urged workers to vote "Yes." The proposed 10.5% wage "increase" over 37 months is essentially wiped out by an expected 3.5%-per-year rise in inflation (10.5% over three years). The combination of 1.5% health care payments — guaranteed to rise as health costs rise — plus fines of 6-day's wages puts workers further behind the 8-ball, in exactly the position Brother Watson cited: "give more, get less."

Now the bosses' media are launching a barrage of anti-worker lies to foster a split between younger and older workers. The fact is, it was the unity of young and old, of black, Latin, Asian and white, of men and women that produced a strike without which workers would be in an even worse position. It was this unity that drove the bosses crazy and enabled the workers to stand up to the MTA, Pataki, Bloomberg, their lying media and the Wall Street banker/bondholders who reap billions in interest off the labor of the transit workers.

The fact that the workers defied the anti-strike Taylor Law and refused to sacrifice for the bosses' war budget turned the strike into a mass political anti-racist struggle — something missing for many years in the U.S.

This defiance of the rulers' state power scared the bosses, particularly in this age of endless wars and a police state. Once workers start thinking — and acting — against the bosses' government, they become more open to the communist idea of fighting beyond reforms and for workers' power. The Progressive Labor Party's ideas were welcomed by the strikers; thousands of communist leaflets and PLP's newspaper CHALLENGE were distributed during the strike.

'The bosses are the real criminals….'

As one worker declared at a Manhattan bus depot picket line, "The bosses are the real criminals. Look what they did to the Enron, Northwest and GM workers. They cut our wages and steal our benefits and then call us 'thugs' for fighting back. Workers are never safe."

Precisely. No matter how hard workers fight within the limits of capitalism — for reform gains — "workers are never safe" from the bosses' attacks to take away any gains.

This strike was even more significant occurring as it did during a murderous imperialist war which could cost over a trillion dollars, money drawn from the cutbacks in pensions, wages and health care.

Finally, this strike was forced by an angry, militant rank and file which is predominantly black and Latin, workers who have suffered — and fought against — racism their entire lives. Another reason the bosses are ready to heap lies of "thuggery" and "selfishness" on the strikers: the rulers fear the leadership that black and Latin workers can give to the entire working class — polls indicated 75% of the city's black workers backed the strikers, as well as a majority of ALL workers. The rulers want to split white workers from uniting behind that kind of militant leadership.

After ending the strike with a lousy projected settlement, Toussaint pushed the rank and file to accept it. Toussaint doesn't act this way because he fears jail or fines (although that might be a factor). He plays this accommodating, sellout role — as do ALL the city's union misleaders who urged him to call off the strike — mainly because he and they defend the capitalist system that is stacked against the working class.

We must support the workers' rejection of this sellout, especially if they decide to strike again, the only leverage workers have in this profits-first-workers-last system. But most important, workers must realize that as long as the bosses hold state power and control the courts, cops and media, we won't be free from their racist system of wage slavery. Building a mass communist leadership among workers and fighting for a new society without bosses is the only way out of this dark endless tunnel.

Issued by CHALLENGE, communist newspaper of the Progressive Labor Party www,plp.org